

TO: Jim Weill, Food Research and Action Center
FROM: Hart Research Associates
DATE: August 12, 2013
RE: Recent Survey Results Related To Public Support For The Food Stamp Program

This memorandum reviews recent survey research related to hunger in America and support for the federally sponsored food stamp program (the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program/SNAP).

Key Findings

- **Despite an improving economy, hunger and food insecurity remain serious problems for many American families.**
 - **Americans still feel strongly that the federal food stamp program is very important for the country.**
 - **Despite concerns about federal spending, there is a strong and stable consensus that cuts to the program are the wrong way to reduce government spending.**
1. Even as the economy continues to recover from the Great Recession, many families still are struggling to put food on the table.

Nearly a quarter (24%) of American families report having a time in the last year when they did not have enough money to buy the food their family needed (Pew/Princeton Survey Research, 2013). This is two points higher than in the spring of 2011, and eight points higher than the spring of 2007, indicating that hunger levels in America have not returned to their pre-recession levels.

A recent Gallup survey reports similar levels of food insecurity: 23% of Americans age 18 to 50 reported times in the past 12 months when they struggled to afford food. The situation is especially acute for single parents, with 31% of single parents reporting struggling to afford food in the past 12 months (Gallup, 2013).

These figures reflect a larger economic environment in which many Americans face debilitating and often pervasive levels of economic uncertainty. The U.S. Census reports 46.2 million people living in poverty—approximately 15% of the entire U.S. population. And a just-released study indicates that 79% of Americans—and 76% of white Americans—experience “economic insecurity” by the time they turn 60, defined as a year or more of periodic joblessness, reliance on government aid such as food stamps or income below 150 percent of the poverty line (AP, 2013).

2. In this context, American voters continue to believe that the food stamp program is important for the country.

In April, nearly three-quarters (73%) of American voters indicated that the food stamp program was either very (41%) or fairly (32%) important for the country (FRAC/Hart Research, 2013). This sentiment is extremely durable, as the proportion has remained between 72% and 74% in four polls taken since 2010.

African Americans (86%), low-income respondents (83%), and Democrats (85%) are particularly supportive of the program; however, even Republicans (60%)—particularly Republican women (70%)—rural voters (71%), and non-college-educated whites (73%) say the food stamp program is important for the country.

How important for the country is the food stamp program?*

	<u>Very/Fairly</u>	<u>Just Somewhat/Not</u>
	%	%
Overall	73	27
Party		
Democrats	85	15
Independents	74	26
Republicans	60	40
Area type		
Urban	78	22
Suburban	73	27
Rural/Small town	71	29
Region		
Northeast	80	20
South	70	30
Midwest	70	30
West	76	24

*All results among registered voters

3. Seven in 10 voters feel that cutting the food stamp program is the wrong way to reduce government spending.

Americans say that cutting food assistance to low-income families is the wrong way to reduce government spending. In an April survey, just 30% of registered voters say they favor cutting food assistance to low-income families and seniors, compared with 70% who say such cuts are the wrong way to reduce government spending. Importantly, half (51%) feel *strongly* that these cuts are the wrong way to reduce government spending (FRAC/Hart, 2013).

Overall opposition to such cuts extends to nearly all major demographic groups, including Republican voters (see below).

Favor/Oppose Cutting Food Assistance*		
	<u>Favor</u>	<u>Oppose</u>
	%	%
Overall	30	70
Party		
Democrats	17	83
Independents	28	72
Republicans	47	53
Area type		
Urban	30	70
Suburban	29	71
Rural/Small town	32	68
Race		
Whites	31	69
African Americans	16	84
Hispanics	36	64
HH Income		
Less than \$35k	20	80
\$35k-\$60k	25	75
\$60k-\$100k	37	63
\$100k or more	34	66
Region		
Northeast	25	75
South	34	66
Midwest	34	66
West	26	74
*All results among registered voters		

4. Americans support more spending on nutrition, not less.

A strong plurality (43%) of American voters feel that the federal government should be spending more money to address the problem of hunger, while only 23% believe we should be spending less money (FRAC/Hart, 2013). In 2011, 54% of voters said we should spend more compared to just 12% who said we should spend less (FRAC/Tyson's/Hart, 2011).

5. Voters prefer cutting subsidies to farmers over cutting food assistance

In the context of the recent debate over the farm bill, 34% of voters prefer reducing spending on subsidies to farmers compared with just 19% who would prefer to reduce spending on food assistance to low-income families and seniors. An additional 47% prefer cutting neither farm subsidies nor food assistance (FRAC/Hart, 2013).

Conclusions

Public support for the federal food stamp program remains robust, and extends to nearly every key demographic group. In particular, when the food stamp program is placed in the context of “food assistance for low-income families and seniors,” strong majorities of both adults and voters say cutting food stamps is the wrong way to reduce government spending. With many Americans still struggling with hunger and inadequate nutrition, the public remains resistant to congressional plans to slash the federal food assistance budget.

Work Cited:

- Gallup-Healthways Well-Being Index; Telephone survey January 1-June 27, 2013, with a random sample of 36,772 adults, aged 18 to 50 years, living in all 50 U.S. states and the District of Columbia.
- Hart Research for Food Research Action Center; Online poll of 850 voters, conducted April 29-May 1, 2013.
- Hart Research for Food Research Action Center and Tyson Foods; Online poll of 1,509 adults, conducted February 8-15, 2011.
- Princeton Survey Research Associates International for PewGlobal Attitudes Project; Telephone poll of 1,002 adults, conducted March 4-18, 2013.
- *U.S. Census.* From the Current Population Survey (CPS), 2012 Annual Social and Economic Supplement (ASEC), the source of official poverty estimates. The CPS ASEC is a sample survey of approximately 100,000 household nationwide. These data reflect conditions in calendar year 2011. <http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/poverty/about/overview/index.html>
- Yen, Hope. Associated Press summary of soon-to-be published research by Mark Rank from Washington University of St. Louis (July 30, 2013)